

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 02338 290551Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
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R 290106Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5593
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 2338

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, BM, BG, PEPR
SUBJECT: CHITTAGONIAN/ARAKAN DISPLACED PERSONS

REF: A. RANGOON 2132 B. RANGOON 2133 (NOTAL)

1. THE NEW BANGLADESH AMBASSADOR TO BURMA, ZAHIRUDDIN, PAID A COURTESY CALL ON AMBASSADOR BEAN ON JUNE 28. THE CALL LASTED AN HOUR AND A QUARTER, MOST OF WHICH WAS DEVOTED TO THE ARAKAN MUSLIM DISPLACED PERSONS SITUATION. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM THE AMBASSADOR, ZAHIRUDDIN LAUNCHED INTO AN EXTENDED LECTURE GIVING THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE MUSLIM PRESENCE IN ARAKAN, THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT'S VIEW OF THE PRESENT SITUATION AND ZAHIRUDDIN'S ESTIMATE REGARDING ULTIMATE RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM. MUCH OF WHAT HE SAID WE HAVE HEARD BEFORE EITHER IN DACCA, RANGOON, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 RANGOO 02338 290551Z

WASHINGTON, OR ELSEWHERE. HOWEVER, PARTS OF HIS PRESENTATION HAD NEW ELEMENTS WHICH ARE REPORTED BELOW.

2. ZAHIRUDDIN CLAIMS TO HAVE VISITED ALL TWELVE CAMPS IN EXISTENCE AS OF THE FIRST OF JUNE (HE LEFT COX'S BAZAAR ON JUNE 3). HE SAID HE PERSONALLY INSPECTED THE REGISTERS AT EACH CAMP AND VERIFIED A TOTAL OF 167,000 REGISTERED PERSONS. HE ALLEGES MANY OTHERS

WERE WAITING TO BE REGISTERED AND HE SAW ADDITIONAL PEOPLE MOVING FROM THE BORDER TO THE CAMP AREAS.

3. ZAHIRUDDIN SAID HE TALKED NOT ONLY WITH BDG PERSONNEL BUT WITH A MEMBER OF THE AFFECTED PERSONS THEMSELVES. HE OPINED THAT THE NUMBER OF PERSONS INJURED BY HOSTILE ACTION WITHIN BURMA HAD BEEN EXAGGERATED. HE ESTIMATED THAT THE TOTAL WAS BETWEEN 200 AND 300 AND THAT SOME OF THESE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN INJURED AS A RESULT OF ACTION OF GUB PERSONNEL (AT LEAST ONE PERSON CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN HIT BY BURMESE MACHINE GUN FIRE). HE WAS TOLD THAT MAGHS AND THUGS HAD LOOTED AND BURNED VILLAGES AND ROBBED GROUPS OF FLEEING PERSONS AS THEY MADE THEIR WAY TO THE BORDER. HE WAS UNCLEAR AS TO WHO HAD PERPETRATED THE ALLEGED RAPES AND REITERATED THE CLAIM THAT YOUNG PERSONS (MALE AND FEMALE APPEARED TO HAVE DISAPPEARED).

4. IN SUPPORT OF HIS CONTENTION THAT MOST OF THE DISPLACED PERSONS WERE IN FACT BURMESE NATIONALS, ZAHIRUDDIN SAID THAT AT THE TIME OF THE SEPARATION OF BURMA FROM INDIA (1937), THE BRITISH GRANTED CITIZENSHIP TO ALL WHO THEN RESIDED IN BURMA. HE FURTHER CONTENDED THAT THIS CITIZENSHIP WAS NOT REVOKED AT THE TIME BURMA BECAME INDEPENDENT (CURRENT GUB CITIZENSHIP LAW DISPUTES THIS).

5. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF JUNE 6-10 GUB-BDG TALKS, ZAHIRUDDIN INDICATED THAT NOT MUCH PROGRESS HAD BEEN REALIZED. HE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 RANGOO 02338 290551Z

CONFIRMED THAT THE GUB HAD AGREED TO TAKE BACK ALL PERSONS WITH NATIONAL REGISTRATION CARDS (NRC'S), BUT SUGGESTED THIS WAS AN UNFAIR CONDITION BECAUSE NO NRC'S HAD BEEN ISSUED SINCE 1962. IN ADDITION, THE AGE OF REGISTRATION WAS TWLEVE, SO THAT NO ONE UNDER THE AGE OF 28 WAS LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN REGISTERED. HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT WHEN REGISTRATION HAD BEEN CONDUCTED, MANY ELIGIBLES HAD BEEN BY-PASSED BECAUSE REGISTRARS SHOWED UP WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE WHEN MANY PEOPLE WERE AWAY FROM THEIR PLACES OF RESIDENCE. HE REITERATED CHARGE THAT SOME NRC'S HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN UNDER FALSE PRETENSES.

6. ZAHIRUDDIN SAID GUB ACKNOWLEDGED THAT AS MANY AT 106,000 OF THE DISPLACED PERSONS MAY HAVE LEGITIMATE CLAIM ON BURMESE RESIDENCE. HE SAID GUB HAS PROPOSED THAT IT DRAW UP A LIST OF REGISTERED PERSONS FROM THE AFFECTED AREA AND THE BDG DRAW UP A LIST OF THOSE IN THE CAMPS. AFTER COMPIATION, THE TWO LISTS WOULD BE COMPARED TO DETERMINE WHO QUALIFIED TO RETURN TO BURMA. ALTHOUGH THE PROCESS IS TO BE CARRIED OUT, ZAHIRUDDIN THINKS IT WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM BECAUSE OF PAST REGISTRATION IRRIGULARITIES AND THE GUB'S LOW ESTIMATE OF DISPLACED LEGITIMATE RESIDENTS. HE ALSO THINKS PROCESS WILL BE TIME CONSUMING BECAUSE OF SLOWNESS OF GUB BUREAUCRACY, WHICH HE OPINED WOULD OPERATE TO

BURMA'S ADVANTAGE BECAUSE INTERNATIONAL INTEREST WILL WANE AS TIME
PASSES, GIVING GUB REASON TO REMAIN INTRACTABLE.

7. ZAHIRUDDIN ACCEPTED AMBASSADOR'S SUGGESTION THAT A BILATERAL
APPROACH TO THE GUB BY ANOTHER GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE
PRODUCTIVE.

8. ZAHIRUDDIN SAID HE HAD DISCUSSED THE PROBLEM WITH PRESIDENT
NE WIN WHEN PRESENTING HIS CREDENTIALS. NE WIN EXPRESSED
SYMPATHY FOR THE BDG'S SITUATION AND INDICATED HE WANTED TO SEE
THE PROBLEM SOLVED. HOWEVER, NE WIN GAVE NO INDICATION OF ANY
CHANGE IN THE GUB'S POSITION.
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